

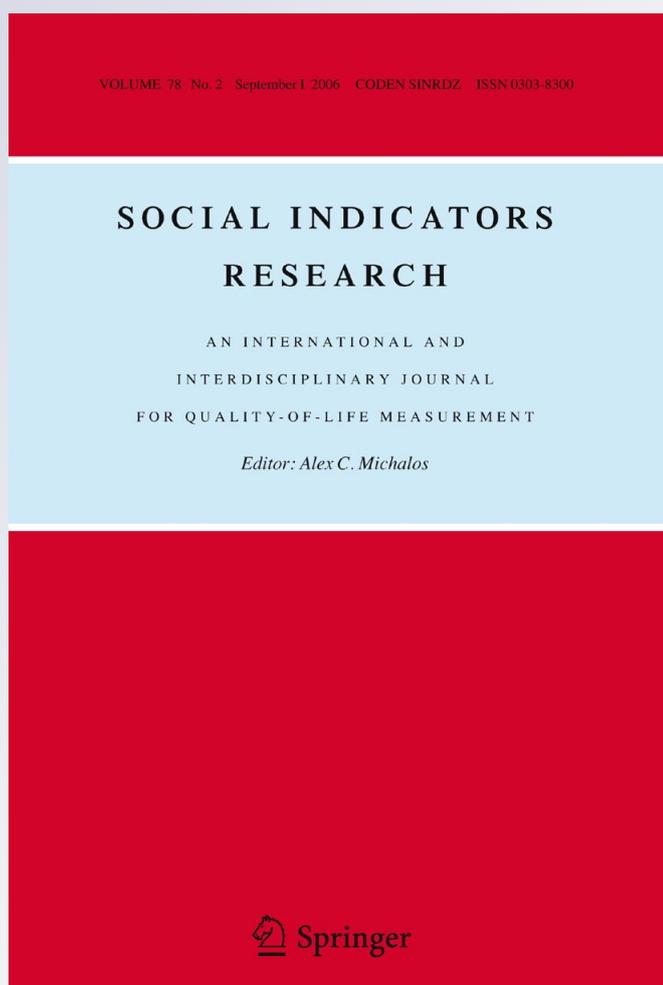
# *Globally Happy: Individual Globalization, Expanded Capacities, and Subjective Wellbeing*

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# Globally Happy: Individual Globalization, Expanded Capacities, and Subjective Wellbeing

Ming-Chang Tsai · Heng-Hao Chang · Wan-chi Chen

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**Abstract** Deep integration of Asia into the global society necessarily affects wellbeing of local populations. This study proposes a notion of “extend capacities” to explain the relationships between individual globalization and subjective wellbeing among Asian populations in a context of increasing global integration. Using Amartya Sen’s theory of human capacities as a point of departure, we advance a distinctive list of expanded capacities, which includes English ability, global exposure and foreign contacts via jobs. Empirical findings from our multilevel analysis of a large sample from 14 Asian countries show the consistent impact of mastering a global lingua franca on job satisfaction, perceived life accomplishment, and happiness. Global exposure also generates some favorable influences.

**Keywords** Happiness · Asia · Globalization · Capacities theory

## 1 Introduction

This study attempts to evaluate the influences of micro-level globalization in subjective wellbeing. As globalization deepens, interdependence between countries has increased immensely through exchanges of goods, technology or ideas. Advanced information technology, global capital mobility, international trade and an emerging norm of cosmopolitanism combine to forge a global society (Held and McGrew 2000; Perrons 2004; Ritzer 2010). At individual level, traveling and networking across borders also expand simultaneously and become a critical aspect of life experience in contemporary society. Transnational activities and connections between various populations reflect the deepening of social integration among people across countries. The global society perspective tends to see these mobility and networking of individuals as another indicator showing the phenomenal architecture of an ever-expanding globalization.

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While this macro-structural argument is well taken, we propose that individual globalization as such be conceived as an element of “extended capacities”, a set of human agency and freedom that can substantially enhance one’s wellbeing. This addition of individual globalization enriches the current theorizing of influences on wellbeing. We use a revised version of the human capacities theory (Sen 1999) to specify the hypothesized association between micro level globalization and wellbeing, and conduct empirical testing by way of pooled data from multiple national surveys.

This research will be conducted in several stages. We first discuss the general ideas of capacities and elaborate a notion of “expanded capacities” from Sen’s approach. We argue that individual globalization can represent an expanded capacity whose increasing importance deserves research attention in the field of wellbeing studies. This will be followed by a section on methodology in which we describe measurement of micro level globalizations and other variables used in our research design as well as explain the usage of multilevel modeling in analysis of a pooled data from 14 Asian countries. Then we report the empirical findings. In the concluding section we summarize our research outcomes and make suggestions for future research about global behaviors and wellbeing.

## 2 Micro Level Globalization: Extended Capacities and Wellbeing

### 2.1 The Idea of Capacities

In proposing the capacities approach to reframe the complex relationship between income, non-income factors and quality of life (QOL), Amartya Sen recognizes the importance of determinants that range beyond the sheer command of economic resources. Market-based goods or services are not the sole determinants of life satisfaction. There are two major reasons that the role of income in QOL can be reduced. On the one hand, income enhances quality of life, especially subjective wellbeing, only to a certain extent, thus carrying a diminishing marginal effect.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, income’s influence likely happens in a context of relative standing. Social comparison explains why certain high income groups are not as happy as predicted. People’s comparative base may be “upgraded” as they accumulate more wealth, consequently feeling not happier with what they have possessed. The resistance to overconcentration on material possessions shifts attention towards possibilities and opportunities that an individual can access in various social institutions and contexts. Sen (1999) proposes a general theory of human capacities not only to account for puzzles derived from the above-mentioned empirical observations but to offer the fundamental ground of new theorizing of human capacities and welfare.

The idea of capability centers in Sen’s idea of wellbeing. We use a framework of means-end to effectively represent his main arguments. There can be little disagreement that a better quality of life is justified as the primary goal of human beings. “Having a joyful life cannot but be among the various objectives we have reason to value.” (Sen 2002:82). For Sen, “quality of life” reflects a person’s life capable of various *doings* and *beings*, that is, the diverse aspects of life conditions people value or deem desirable (Sen 1985). This is termed the *functionings* aspect of QOL. Subjective wellbeing (in a state of being) represents a critical dimension of human functionings: This claim parallels his critique of concentration on the distribution of resources rather than on distribution of welfares. For Sen, human functionings depend much on a person’s *capability*, which refer

<sup>1</sup> See also Ball and Chernova (2008); Hagerty et al. (2001); Sirgy et al. (2006).

to a person's "opportunity to achieve valuable combinations of human functionings—what a person is able to do or be" (Sen 2005:153). To see opportunities in terms of capacities, Sen forcefully contends, allow an informative distinguishing between what a person actually is able to freely function (that is, the ultimate goal) and the needed *means, instruments, or permissions* to pursue the valued doing and being (Sen 2005:153).

Note that capacities, conceptually, differ from actual achievements. The same level of nutrition owing to fasting and starving, for instance, clearly does not indicate equality in the resultant achievements (Fleurbaey 2006). This shows how unequal capacities are critical in determining choices and conditions in life. The capacities theory does not suggest that researchers of QOL disregard the notion of achievement. Rather, it alerts and justifies a critical vector of opportunities and freedom through which wellbeing and joyful life can be obtained.

## 2.2 Individual Globalization as Extended Capacities

We now turn to the issue of operationalization: what constitutes a capacity in a certain context? As societies with variable wealth constitute different contexts for certain selective capacities to meaningfully function, Sen has been careful not to offer a "fixed forever" list of capabilities. Indeed, the flexibility inherent in the idea of capacity implies a breadth in measurement. It can relate to things near to survival (availability of clean drinking water) as well as to those less central (travel for pleasures) (Alkire 2005). But a "minimal list" of capacities to get at a decent quality of life, if chosen by Sen, would largely overlap with what has been termed as "basic needs" (income, education, health) (Streedon et al. 1982; Jolly 2010). Indeed, there seems to be a consensus on the "basic capacities" for better QOL. But this is not what this study's major interest. We seek to introduce some capacities beyond the "basics" and test their effects on subjective wellbeing. Conceptually, "expanded capacities" as such refer to desirable context-specific opportunities other than income and other basic abilities (literary and physical strength) that help fulfill human functionings. Our focus is on certain capacities that relate to an individual's involvement in the global economy or global society. We consider these global involvements with transnational linkages built up consequently to be a distinctive category of capacities that impact subjective wellbeing.

Globalization is an omnipresent phenomenon of transnational processes involving growing multidirectional flows of people, objects and information (Perrons 2004; Ritzer 2010). Such large scale exchanges and interdependence between countries have generated various impacts on national structures as well as daily lives. Neoliberals make claims of increased efficiency and resultant greater benefits from an expanding world market. Critiques of economic liberalism highlight numerous harmful outcomes by arguing that an unconstrained global market is responsible for increasing social inequality, systemic instability, reduced wage, as well as weakened states to deal with these problems that are rooted at the global systems beyond governmental interventions. The great globalization debate continued over a decade (Held and McGrew 2000; Hirst and Thompson 1999; Petras and Veltmeyer 2001; Sklair 2002; Stiglitz 2002). These grand narratives and the arguments for and against globalization can be more well-rounded and influential if further attention is paid to the detailing of the capacities and opportunities of individuals being connected in various ways to the "outside world" and the impacts resultantly incurred on their life chances and wellbeing. We elaborate this argument of micro level globalization as follows.

Border crossing behavior and transnational connection can be conceived as a duo of “expanded capacities” representing core elements of individual globalization. Crossing borders on erstwhile unfamiliar territories that await one’s corporal presence may carry different purposes. It might fulfill business purposes; or it occurs as leisure travel. A classic example of such border crossing is the so-called “Grand Tour”, in which affluent landed classes from Europe were attracted to Italy to search in person the Renaissance and authentic antiquity (Towner 1985; Wilton-Ely 2004). Paralleling Grand tours that reached its zenith in the Eighteenth century, contemporary cultural tourism, more popular across various classes, also has an educational mission of quest for knowledge by way traveling across the continents, though in a more “playful” mood (Urry 2002). In general, border crossing in modern society is much diversified in genres and motivations. In the wake of the second World War, business trips dominated for a short period before mass tourism became overwhelming, with family holidays conducted in ways of ethnic tourism (“multicultural”), game tourism (“nature-loving”), sports tourism (“healthy”). For some people, stepping into another territory means more than visual gazes at spectacular grand capital cities: sights are mixed up with sun, sand and sex (Crick 1996; Urry 2002). Despite these complex representations of mobility across the globe, one fundamental feature of this increasingly popular behavior is a splendid combination of fun, exploration, and imagination. Mobile people thus have privileged access to experiments, pleasures and opportunities deriving from corporal (rather than virtual) exploring into one’s “newfoundlands”.

Transnational networking constitutes another critical element of micro level globalization. Networking has been considered as an important resource that helps achieve certain goals, according to the theory of social ties and social capital (Coleman 1988; Granovetter 1983; Lin 2002). Interpersonal relationships established with overseas friends or colleagues are a helpful source in careers. Kennedy’s (2004) study of transnational professionals in the building design industry shows that international professional workers were capable of constructing *in situ* transnational social ties. They participated in localized networks built around occupational links. Their intense inter-firm links helped establish transnational work-based networks across global cities. Another investigation of transnational managerial elites working in the financial sector of New York City similarly evidence the importance of stretching networking activities over national boundaries either via virtual communication or by real time “co-presence” (Beaverstock 2005; see also Conradson and Latham 2005; Larsen et al. 2006 for similar studies of professionals in Western societies). In the East Asian context, Ong’s (1999) ethnographic study documents the diasporan Chinese whose strategic usage of *guanxi* (interpersonal relations) networks allows them to circumvent or even benefit from different nation-state regulations and to reposition their families and capital in chosen global cities in Western countries. Interpersonal linkages are not limited of this genre within family members. Those from outside kin also help overcome obstacles in cross-border mobilities as well as establish businesses (Tseng 2000; Tzeng’s 2010). Emerging out of the literature of “global mobility” is a consensus over the power of social networking across borders in helping pursue various goals.

As this study focuses on Asian people, their mastering of a global lingua franca cannot be emphasized too much. In this region, English dominates when it comes to the most learned and used language for international communication. The spread of English has been fostered by many governments in the region as English is designated as the first foreign language in formal educational curriculum. Most Asian countries are positioned in what Kachru (Kachru and Nelson 1996) has termed the “expanding circle,” in which English has been widely studied for specific functions such as accessing the knowledge of

science and technology. In contrast, Singapore and India are situated in the “outer circle” in reference to Kachru’s (Kachru and Nelson 1996) model of expanding world Englishes (the “core” being the UK, USA, Australia, etc.). English in these outer circle countries has been long institutionalized and stands as a language of wide importance in governance as well as social life. English fluency, for Asian people, serves as a critical cultural capacity through which desirable resources, knowledge, and influences can be obtained. Surveys indicate that people in East Asia have a consensus that mastering English, more than other languages, is essential in international communication (Sasaki et al. 2006). English can be conceived as a “linguistic network capital” (Urry 2007:197) that represents an individual’s specific capacity to make mobility onto other countries and sustain cross border relationships therein with greater ease, even *within* the region of Asia.

English ability and transnational experiences represent a set of “expanded capacities” whose advantages increase as globalization accelerates in contemporary Asia. By expanded capacities we stress the benefits derived from the opportunities and freedom to be mobile across border and establish overseas networks—these capacities clearly lie beyond a minimal list of basic needs or basic capacities that many QOL researches had concerned. Researchers also have elaborated human capacities in other lines. Nussbaum (2001) focuses on a totality of body, affect and reasoning ability. Social security and social inclusion arguably can be added to the list of expanded capacities (Gasper 2007). Different social conditions and evaluative purposes thus may suggest distinctive capacities to investigate advantages and adversities across peoples. Indeed, Even Sen (2005:160), in evaluating the developmental context of India, holds that access to the internet should be an important capacity, because of the need to effectively communicate across the this country and beyond. A fixed or predetermined list of capacities might not work in real worlds (Sen 2005). The need to develop certain lists of capacities for wide-ranging applications should be considered not a weakness, but a strength and flexibility of the capacities approach. Note that border crossing, transnational networking and acquired English fluency as expanded capacities conceptually have to be distinguished from the *achievements* of an agency (mostly measured by material possessions). These expanded capacities reflect more of freedom or choice of an individual than affluence or goods with high market prices. There is no denying that achievements are a strong determinant of wellbeing. The main point is that expanded capacities, beyond basic ones, should be taken seriously for a fuller understanding of how people promote their functionings with adequate choices and how these freedoms constitutes a solid ground of happiness and joyful life (Sen 2002).<sup>2</sup>

### 3 The Current Research and Hypothesis

Our emphasis in micro level globalization as a representation of capacities differs substantially from previous research interests. Previous studies regularly surveyed how various demographic characteristics associated with subjective wellbeing. Overall, women report higher levels of happiness or life satisfaction than men (Blanchflower and Oswald 2004). Married people are happier than those of other marital statuses (Yang 2008; Stack and Eshleman 1998; Haller and Hadler 2006; Shin and Inoguchi 2009), though another interpretation of this correlation is that happy people are more likely to get married or stay married (Stutzer and Frey 2006). Some studies report U-shaped age effects, which suggests

<sup>2</sup> Critiques of Sen also highlight its insufficient attention to distribution and equality of actual abilities, a research question which, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of this study (see Fleurbaey 2006).

a nonlinear trend that goes downward first and upward later through life courses and reaches the bottom around middle age (Gerdtham and Johannesson 2001; Yang 2008; Blanchflower and Oswald 2008). Education is another oft-cited factor, with higher educational attainment being asserted a strong predictor of subjective wellbeing (Blanchflower and Oswald 2004; Easterlin 2001; Yang 2008). Additionally, a bulk of research identifies the negative impact of unemployment (Clark and Oswald 1994; Frey and Stutzer 2002; Blanchflower and Oswald 2004). Health no doubt is one of the most important sociodemographic determinants of wellbeing (De Mello and Tiongson 2009; Clark and Oswald 2002; Michalos and Zumbo 2000). Taking advantage of longitudinal data, Oswald and Powdthavee (2008) indicates that a negative impact on mental wellness may continue even after a considerable recovery of health. While studies as reviewed above contribute to our understanding of general patterns of wellbeing, they as a whole offer less information to the question of how an individual's wellbeing can be improved by way of strengthening an individual's life chances or opportunities.

Our research also stands in contrast to conventional researches on Asian population that tend to engage in the debate of material versus cultural factors in determining subjective well-being (Diener 2000). For instance, Inoguchi and Shin (2009) argue that for Confucian Asia such as Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, values that emphasize social relationships, family, community, harmony and trust help explain how happiness and life satisfaction is achieved in Asian countries (Shin and Inoguchi 2009; Tokuda et al. 2010; Tan and Tambyah 2010). Chen's comparative study of East Asian populations shows that education brought about extensive social networks and connections, both domestic and overseas, which contribute significantly to happiness (Chen forthcoming). In a study on Singapore people, relations with significant others help achieve better quality of life (Tambyah et al. 2009). Lack of interpersonal trust is a major factor of unhappiness in Japan (Tokuda and Inoguchi 2008). Liao et al. (2005) additionally demonstrate that the high level of perceived fairness in socioeconomic condition contributes to one's happiness and quality of life from samples of Taiwan and Hong Kong. Despite certain merits from a cultural approach to understanding life satisfaction of Asian people, there is a paucity of consideration of relationships between capacities and wellbeing in the population of Asia.

In sum, we propose a hypothesis that individual globalization is a positive factor of individual's wellbeing, as it is an expanded capacity that enhances one's opportunities in a globalizing world. In the following, we offer evidence from empirical analyses of pooled Asian populations in support of the capacities theory.

#### 4 Data and Methods

The data were drawn from the AsiaBarometer (AB) survey, which is a collaborative project currently based in University of Niigata Prefecture, Japan ([www.asiabarometer.org](http://www.asiabarometer.org)). We used the recently released 2006 and 2007 data covering East and Southeast Asia. The AB survey project was initiated in 2003 to collect information on social lives and cultural values of Asian people. The techniques of multistage stratified sampling were applied to conduct face to face interviews of respondents who aged between 20 and 69.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In some situations quota sampling was used as supplementary methods to obtain a sample comparable with that of a country. There were some compromises, however. For Viet Nam, major urban populations were sampled. Some proportions of the population, for example, people in isolated islands or rural areas, were excluded due to practical constraints in the field.

The questionnaire was first formulated in English. This common questionnaire was then translated into local languages by local survey companies. Local language questionnaires were checked through back translation. The sample was 1,000 for each country except China, where 2,000 respondents were interviewed. This study will select only respondents that currently held a job and aged between 20 and 64 in analysis. That is, the retired, students or houseworkers (mostly wives) are excluded.

#### 4.1 Individual Globalization

The 2006 and 2007 AB surveys provided information of English fluency and global behaviors which we adopted to measure expanded capacities of an individual. English fluency is a self-rated ability on four point scale, from “speaking fluently” (coded 4) to “not at all” (1). To measure individual global experiences, we used three indicators from the Survey: (1) whether a respondent “traveled abroad at least three times in the past 3 years, on holiday or for business purposes”; (2) responses to “I have friends from other country who are in [respondent’s country]”; and (3) “I often communicate with people in other countries via the Internet or email”. The three proxies combine to constitute a composite index of “global exposure”, covering both border crossing experiences and global connections. As the three highly correlated measures were binary in design (1 = yes, 0 = no), we calculated their average scores as a summary indicator.

In addition, we mobilized a binary indicator of job-related global contact: “My job involves contact with organizations or people in other countries”. We did so because we will consider the evaluation of achievement to be one of our dependent variable.

We use three different measures of subjective wellbeing as our dependent variables. The first one is work satisfaction (five point scale from very satisfied (coded 5) to very dissatisfied (coded 1)) (See Table 1 for aggregate statistics at country level). The second measure concerns an overall evaluation of one’s life achievements: “How much do you feel you are accomplishing what you want out of your life?” The responses are of four categories: a great deal, some, very little and none (coded from 4–1). The last measure is perhaps the most often used measure in soliciting level of subjective wellbeing: “All things considered, would you say that you are happy these days?” The happiness measure is of five point scale: very happy, quite happy, neither happy nor unhappy, not too unhappy, very unhappy (coded from 5 to 1). Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the three outcomes across 14 surveyed countries. The obtained coefficients of intraclass correlation (approximately .10) from the intercept-only model (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002) show that for the three subjective wellbeings, variations across countries are modest (see the last entry).

#### 4.2 Control Variables

We consider a comprehensive range of control variables in estimation. A respondent’s gender (male = 1, female = 0); age; education (a set of dummies of “college and above”, “senior high school” and “junior high school or less”, with the last group being a reference); family income (z scores computed in individual countries).<sup>4</sup> We also included occupational status. The AB survey prelisted a dozen of job categories in soliciting information about jobs. This design, while it falls short in gathering details such as skill

<sup>4</sup> We use family income to explore the influence of a family’s economic resources; information of personal income was not collected in the AB survey. Our way of operationalization allows us to capture the effects of *relative* economic status within a country.

**Table 1** Job satisfaction and life accomplishment in 14 Asian countries (%)

	Job satisfaction		Life accomplishment		Happiness	
	Somewhat <sup>a</sup>	Very satisfied	Some <sup>b</sup>	A great deal	Quite happy <sup>c</sup>	Very happy
<i>East Asia</i>	33.3	6.9	52.2	5.3	39.8	13.5
China	22.3	8.4	54.9	6.0	38.5	17.9
Hong Kong	42.2	3.0	49.5	6.2	45.0	6.0
Japan	48.4	9.9	58.1	5.6	41.6	13.8
Korea	31.9	6.1	47.7	3.4	42.4	9.8
Taiwan	34.8	5.4	47.1	4.2	33.8	14.1
<i>Southeast Asia</i>	43.5	21.5	58.8	15.5	47.4	22.5
Cambodia	32.5	24.4	51.4	4.3	26.6	3.2
Indonesia	33.4	20.5	58.4	24.3	52.9	12.6
Laos	49.9	19.8	71.8	19.5	58.4	18.2
Malaysia	58.7	17.8	57.7	24.3	53.8	33.2
Myanmar	45.8	10.0	50.6	3.0	49.2	11.0
Philippines	44.6	28.8	52.2	23.7	46.9	38.3
Singapore	51.7	24.0	61.3	16.0	52.7	25.1
Thailand	47.3	28.3	66.9	8.3	58.8	21.3
Vietnam	27.2	18.0	56.6	17.4	26.7	38.8
<i>All Asia</i>	39.5	15.8	56.2	11.5	44.4	19.0
Intraclass correlation	.068		.099		.102	

<sup>a</sup> Measured on five point scale; three lower categories not shown to save space

<sup>b</sup> Measured on four point scale; two lower categories not shown to save space

<sup>c</sup> See 1 above

levels, nevertheless allows us to identify major categories of occupation. The resultant occupational status scheme contrasts the following five groupings: agricultural workers, business owners, white collar workers (largely skilled office workers), blue collar workers (lower-grade skills and work in manufacturing sector), as well as the unemployed. We chose the blue collar workers as our reference group in order to capture their different level of joy from professional workers as well their gap with those currently not hired in labor market. Health, a robust factor of subjective wellbeing, was included (on five point scale). Trust in other people<sup>5</sup> is our last control. Its influence on subjective wellbeing had been interpreted as optimist attitudes toward people in general. An alternative view is that the respondents' answers relate to those people they interacted in sub-national communities (Hwlliwel 2003), thus reflecting strength of social capital at local neighborhoods.

### 4.3 Estimation

We pooled respondents from fourteen participating countries for empirical estimation. As our data involve both individual and national units, the conventional least square techniques are inadequate due to the assumption of independent observations from a

<sup>5</sup> The original question is: Generally, do you think people can be trusted or do think that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? The responses are binary: most people can be trusted (= 1); or can't be too careful in dealing with people (= 0).

homogenous sub-population. Nonindependence as such tends to give smaller standard errors and “spuriously significant” results when the conventional least square method is applied (Hox 2002; Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). For remedy, we use hierarchical linear modeling to simultaneously estimate individual and contextual effects as this method allows flexible specification of multilevel information and error structures at different levels.

The specification of individual level modeling using job satisfaction as example is:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{Male}) + \beta_{2j}(\text{Age}) + \beta_{3j}(\text{Age square}) + \beta_{4j}(\text{Senior H. School}) \\ + \beta_{5j}(\text{College}) + \beta_{6j}(\text{Married}) + \dots + r_{ij}$$

where  $Y_{ij}$  is the predicted score of job satisfaction for the respondent  $i$  from country  $j$ , and  $r_{ij}$  is individual level error. Our multilevel modeling allows country differences to vary, which usually is referred as the random-intercept model (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). The specification of country-level influence is:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$$

where  $\gamma_{00}$  is the average outcome for the used whole population and  $u_{0j}$  denotes a country-specific effect.

Our preliminary analysis considered a possibility that economic development and democracy at societal level generate favorable influences on country level of subjective wellbeing, as some literature had suggested (Diener and Oishi 2000; Easterlin 2005; Tsai 2009; Frey and Stutzer 2000; Inglehart and Klingemann 2000). However, our test of both gross national income per capita and a popular democratization index<sup>6</sup> did not reach significance, probably because of the smaller degree of freedom in our pooled data. Our research design nevertheless takes into account the aggregate differences between the 14 countries.

## 5 Empirical Analysis

Our analysis begins with estimation results of job satisfaction by multi-level modeling. The first equation on Table 2 reports estimation results from socio-demographic controls. We found that among respondents from 14 countries, the higher educated, married, and upper-middle classes (business owners and professionals) tend to rate themselves higher in job satisfaction. Income, health and trust also generate significant influences. These outcomes replicated previous studies as cited in Session 3. In Eq. 2 we added three expanded capacities to examine their influence net of controls. English fluency reaches significance level and generates the expected positive effects. Global exposure also produces a favorable influence. However, foreign contact due to job has only a trivial effect, though its positive sign is as expected. This weak influence might be due to its lower incidents as most workers (over 95%) in lower income countries in the region reported no such contacts.<sup>7</sup> Another explanation is that this measure indicates “sheer contacts” for many

<sup>6</sup> National income, measured in year of 2005, was drawn from the web of the World Bank ([www.worldbank.com](http://www.worldbank.com)). A composite democracy index was drawn from the Freedom House ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)). It was an average score of 2004–2006 to even out possible fluctuations in certain countries.

<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, Singapore registers the highest percentage (23.8%) as this country's financial and productive sectors are deeply embedded in global markets. Hong Kong ranks the second, but lags far behind with its statistic of 9.3%.

**Table 2** Job satisfaction in 14 Asian countries: multi-level analysis

	All sample		Male	Female
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male(=1; female = 0)	-.029	-.033		
Age	.011	.010	-.001	.024
Age square/100	.008	.007	.006	-.022
Education (Junior H. = 0)				
Senior H.	.107***	.070***	.076*	.052
College	.210***	.135***	.100*	.175***
Marital status (Single = 0)				
Married	.052*	.058*	.070*	.062
Divorced	-.122*	-.120	-.024	-.186*
Widowed	-.028	-.006	-.012	-.013
Occupation (Blue-collar = 0)				
Agricultural worker	-.022	-.024	.047	-.132*
Business owner	.104**	.098*	.135**	.031
White-collar	.107***	.092***	.120***	.061
Unemployed	-.514***	-.521***	-.569***	-.470***
Income	.086***	.077***	.083***	.062***
Health	.283***	.282***	.280***	.284***
Trust	.094***	.089***	.075**	.096**
English fluency		.064***	.063**	.076**
Global exposure		.122*	.126*	.121
Foreign contact due to job		.073	.086	.063
Intercept	2.024	1.921	2.138	1.631
Random effect				
Variance components- $u_{0j}$	.068	.059	.053	.067
Residual- $r_{ij}$	.811	.805	.809	.798
Model $\chi^2$	1,706.7	1,733.3	998.4	756.5
<i>N</i>	10,153	10,021	5,831	4,190

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

workers likely positioned as subordinates that it fails to reflect a true capacity as we have conceived. Equations 3 and 4 estimated the males and females respectively, to cross check if our modeling is robust across genders. The outcomes are largely similar. Global exposure's influence is somewhat attenuated for females. Alternatively, male workers benefit more from their global exposure for job satisfaction. We note that female agricultural workers in this region register a substantially lower score on job satisfaction. Studies of poor female farmers in South Asia documented their disadvantages with regards to tenure security, access to water, fertilizers, credits and marketing (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli 2010). While our data do not allow conducting a detailed research along this line, future studies should pay attention to this group's wellbeing level.

We display the estimation results of life accomplishment on Table 3. Education, occupation, being married, high income, good health, and a high level of trust that reflects

**Table 3** Life accomplishment in 14 Asian countries: multi-level analysis

	All sample			Male	Female
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Male(=1; female = 0)	-.022	-.026	-.022		
Age	-.004	-.003	-.003	-.005	-.002
Age square/100	.009	.009	.008	.010	-.004
Education (Junior H. = 0)					
Senior H.	.083***	.055**	.041*	.034	.053
College	.169***	.104***	.082***	.088**	.070*
Marital status (Single = 0)					
Married	.120***	.123***	.116***	.108***	.125**
Divorced	-.009	-.007	.007	.046	-.017*
Widowed	.014	.026	.042	.034	.065
Occupation (Blue-collar = 0)					
Agricultural worker	.024	.027	.032	.051	-.004
Business owner	.064*	.051	.039	.028	.054
White-collar	.055**	.041*	.029	.038	.019
Unemployed	-.081**	-.082**	-.015	-.022	-.009
Income	.076***	.068***	.058***	.053***	.066***
Health	.099***	.098***	.060***	.066***	.054***
Trust	.078***	.077***	.068***	.055**	.085**
English fluency		.055***	.047***	.049**	.042*
Global exposure		.159***	.149***	.165**	.123
Foreign contact due to job		.025	.013	.002	.039
Job satisfaction			.130***	.127***	.136***
Intercept	2.193	2.095	1.819	1.798	1.825
Random effect					
Variance components- $u_{0j}$	.053	.051	.044	.046	.041
Residual- $r_{ij}$	.426	.423	.409	.409	.410
Model $\chi^2$	766.4	813.4	1,166.3	693.7	486.0
<i>N</i>	10,224	10,093	9,996	5,814	4,182

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

a thick norm of belief in others facilitates one’s sense of life accomplishment. Occupational status particularly impacts self-rated fulfillments in that business owner and while-collar workers, due to their possession of “means of productions” and “professional skills”, enjoy a feeling of achievement more than blue collar workers do. Not surprisingly, the unemployed register the lowest score herein. When we added three expanded capacities variables in Eq. 2, English fluency and global exposure both contribute positively to life accomplishment. However, the effect of foreign contact due to job remains insignificant. As life accomplish is intimately associated with job conditions, we further add job satisfaction into Eq. 3 as another necessary control factor. Respondents’ with higher job satisfaction indeed enhances a sense of accomplishment. English fluency and exposure’s effects are not moderated due to addition of this new control. When we explore plausible gendered patterns in Eqs. 4 and 5, the outcomes show similarities between two sexes.

**Table 4** Happiness in 14 Asian countries: multi-level analysis

	All sample			Male	Female
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Male(=1; female = 0)	-.064*	-.067***	-.062***		
Age	-.011	-.011*	-.012*	-.012	-.011
Age square/100	.010	.011	.010	.011	.009
Education (Junior H. = 0)					
Senior H.	.068**	.047*	.032	.022	.049
College	.114***	.071**	.045	.042	.054
Marital status (Single = 0)					
Married	.148***	.152***	.143***	.127***	.166***
Divorced	-.223***	-.229***	-.211***	-.220**	-.193**
Widowed	.049	.073	.079	.010	.129
Occupation (Blue-collar = 0)					
Agricultural worker	.032	.032	.034	.013	.063
Business owner	.022	.015	.000	.008	-.014
White-collar	.040	.030	.016	.029	-.005
Unemployed	-.101**	-.103**	-.023	-.032	.011
Income	.053***	.046***	.033***	.027**	.042**
Health	.211***	.209***	.163***	.173***	.154***
Trust	.134***	.133***	.119***	.140***	.083**
English fluency		.046**	.036**	.051**	.018
Global exposure		.087	.069	.007	.164*
Foreign contact due to job		.016	.002	.003	.006
Job satisfaction			.160***	.163***	.158***
Intercept	3.012	2.941	2.616	2.483	2.679
Random effect					
Variance components- $u_{oj}$	.061	.055	.046	.048	.046
Residual- $r_{ij}$	.619	.616	.595	.609	.573
Model $\chi^2$	1,053.7	1,058.4	1,429.3	839.6	599.8
N	10,244	10,112	10,016	5,827	4,189

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Interestingly, similar to what we found in job satisfaction in Table 2, global exposure is relatively weak in its influence on female's sense of accomplishment.

We investigate influences of happiness in Table 4. Most demographics and trust factor hold in their impacts, and age's inverted U shape effect appear for the happiness equation. Yet occupational effects are substantially attenuated. This might be because that happiness, being a measure of psychological affect, responds only slightly to one's possession of skills or a business. Equation 2 examines influences of global variables, in which we find English fluency maintains a strong impact on this avowed wellbeing. The other two microglobalization factors have only thin influence, failing to reach significance level. This result remains unchanged when we add job satisfaction as additional control in Eq. 3. We also note that ability of using a global lingua franca particularly boosts males' happiness, while

this was not observed among females.<sup>8</sup> Our speculation is that English is primarily an instrument for bettering economic life in Asia. Females, despite their increasing participation in labor market in this region, are less likely to benefit from it as they more likely occupy relatively marginal positions at the periphery sectors that characterize dead-end, low-pay, and contingent jobs, especially in lower income countries of this region (Yu and Thang 2004). Therefore we obtained only a weak relationship between happiness and language ability. However, for those females that are exposed to more global flows and fluxes, they apparently enjoy a higher level of positive psychology than other females lacking such capacities (column 5).

## 6 Conclusion

This study proposes using the idea of “extend capacities” to account for subjective wellbeing among Asian populations. Amartya Sen’s idea of human capacities serves well as an inspiring point of departure. Researchers working on particular fields yet have to develop their distinctive lists of expanded capacities. This means that elaborations of certain desirable capacities specific to the analyzed contexts necessarily call for “local” theoretical imaginations and innovative measurement. Research questions derived from this line of thinking, for instance, are: what specific capacities beyond income and communicative ability are needed to craft a workable intimate relationship between couples to achieve marital satisfaction? What expanded capacities, other than material gains and general education, are helpful in enhancing a person’s ability of appreciating art and deriving happiness from consumption of cultural artifacts? Of course, it is a necessity to explore how these expanded capacities are distributed in certain ways that some groups benefit from them while others are unfortunately deprived of. We hope that this study has set a useful example for this genre of study.

In the context of an increasingly globalized Asia, we contend that the expanded capacities of English ability, border crossing and transnational networking become increasingly influential for individuals’ wellbeing. Our multilevel analysis of a large sample from 14 Asian countries highlight particularly the importance of mastering a global lingua franca in job satisfaction, feeling of accomplishment, and happiness. This global language’s effects are robust and consistent, net of the influences of material and cultural factors identified by major theories. Global exposure also generates some notable effects. Our empirical testing provides supportive evidence to the individual globalization-wellbeing hypothesis. Simply put, people that are more globalized are more satisfied with their job and life.

There exist some limitations for this study. Measures of global exposure as used in this study can be more inclusive. Transnational social capital that an individual develops can unfold into various networking with overseas kin, friends or colleagues. Global cultural exposure should also be tapped and incorporated by future studies to examine if exposure to global ideas and consumption of cosmopolitan cultures (Tsai and Appelbaum 2010) can operate as additional elements of perceived wellbeing for specific social groups. This study focuses mainly on job- and work-related outcomes. How individual globalization affects

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<sup>8</sup> It might be because females tend to have lower scores and thus less variation in this language variable, which it renders our modeling poorly fit. However, this is not the case we found there is no difference in English ability across genders.

other areas like satisfaction in human relationship or cultural life also needs investigation to obtain a fuller understanding of its potential impacts.

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